



31.

CHURCH OF SAINT MARY OF BARRÔ



Rua de Santa Maria de
Barrô, Barrô
Resende



41° 7' 44.39" N
7° 52' 57.40" W



+351 918 116 488



Sunday, 8.30 am (winter)
or 8 am (summer)



Saint Mary
15th August



National Monument
1922



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The Church of Barrô was built in a steep sloped area, so the main façade is at a lower level than the chancel. It is surely a late Romanesque building, but that was already testing, in this region, a language that was close to the Gothic style that, by the time of its construction, was already gaining importance in other building sites across the Portuguese country.

Although we are able to date the foundation of the Church of Barrô back to the 12th century - as the private church of Egas Moniz (1080-1146), the Schoolmaster and Governor, which came to his hands by royal donation -, we know nothing about what was built/transformed at the time, or if it was just a matter of giving continuity to a worship that was probably being practised in an already existing temple. As it is commonly known, Egas Moniz was the "lieutenant" of São Martinho de Mouros between 1106 and 1111 and the governor of the Lamego region between 1113 and 1117 - and maybe even until later in time. Having managed to assert himself politically in a kingdom under construction, Egas Moniz, of the Ribadouro family, offered plentiful donations to religious institutions from which we



highlight the Monastery of Paço de Sousa (Penafiel) (p. 90), where he had himself buried. Later, his daughter-in-law, Sancha Vermudes (c. 1130-?), donated the patronage of the Church of Barrô to the Knights Hospitaller (1208).

So, the power associated with these patronages fully justifies the construction of a somewhat pompous building depicting significant influences, from which we highlight the Coimbra cathedral, via the Porto cathedral, visible on the composition of the main façade. Although the Church of Barrô does not feature a protruding volume framing the portal and a rosette framed by an overlapping large window, we are surely standing before a building influenced by these cathedral models, meaning it was certainly built in the 13th century. While the archivolts of the large window, which frame the Proto-Gothic rosette, are round, the ones in the portal are broken. And, on the latter, the capitals' botanic and floral sculpture is announcing the Gothic style, since its naturalist motifs are very attached

to the frustum. The portal's tympanum is remarkably carved, showing a highly elaborate hollowed cross. The bell tower adorsed to the south side of the main façade was rebuilt in the late 19th century.

The composition of the lateral portals shows a sharp contrast with that of the main façade. The archivolts are supported by the wall's own thickness and do not feature any columns. The corbels take on a wide variety of shapes.

The Church's interior is dominated by granite. The size of the nave and the chancel, particularly in terms of their height, are already announcing the Gothic style. Despite the fact that the language of its capitals is still very much Romanesque, the triumphal arch, with its wide opening, is already announcing the liturgical change. The intimate Romanesque chevets - lower and narrower than the nave, creating suitable spaces for retreat - are succeeded by the large and bright Gothic chevets - open to the devotees.

Knowing that human figuration is not a usual motif in the Portuguese Romanesque





style, we should notice the capital that, on the Epistle side, shows us a hunting scene in which the central figure is a man who, besides playing a hunting horn, is holding a spear in his right hand. The hunting horn was commonly used to communicate messages in times of danger. On the right side there is a quadruped (perhaps a bovine) and on the opposite side there is a character that seems to be armed with a sort of shield in the right hand and a club in the left hand. The hunting theme, as an allegory of the struggle against evil, is also depicted on the opposite capital, where a boar is being grabbed by its paw and ear by two quadrupeds, perhaps two dogs. The central arch of the chancel, which helps to support the vault, already shows a few capitals that reveal a different taste, closer to the one that spread across the Sousa basin and whose botanic motifs were then bevelled.

The terminal section of the chancel is the result of an extension made to accommodate the scenographic Baroque altarpiece, designed according to the Johannine style [style which develops during the reign of King João V (k. 1706-1750)] and whose imposing Eucharistic throne defines the composition. The medieval Marian invocation (Saint Mary) was succeeded - already during the Modern Period - by the Virgin of the Assumption, which takes central stage on the main altarpiece and exudes the same style as the woodwork's language. The collateral altarpieces were certainly made during an earlier period and their woodwork was most certainly still influenced by the much appreciated National Style [1690-1725].

In the chancel we highlight the sculptural ensemble of the Calvary, eccentric in size and comprising a crucified Christ, the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist.